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The East Timor Issue-Perspectives by a practising Catholic East Timorese born Ausrtralian bred young woman

By Nidia Maria Madeira Oliveira

Ladies and gentlemen I do not pretend to be an expert in any formal capacity on the issue of East Timor, so before I begin my paper presentation today, I would like to clarify on what terms I have agreed to be a participant in this symposium.

I come not as a member be it active or dormant of any of the existing political parties which claim to represent the intentions of the East Timorese people.

Nor do I stand before you simply because I happen to be the daughter of the General Secretary of one of these political parties. I know that nepotism abounds aplenty in the so called "inner circles" when dealing with worldy matters and if I were really interested in worldly matters and political parties I would have signed on the dotted line ages ago.

I state from the start and it is your perogative whether or not you chose to believe me that the themes I present to you in this paper are purely from a very personal perspective.

It is often said that there is nothing new under the sun, so most of what you are about to hear has been said before in some shape or form-for the themes I present are universal truths-truths which perhaps may not have been previously presented by a "Practising Catholic, East Timorese born, Australian bred young woman".

Now that I have met symposium protocols and given you the title of my paper, I would like to start the paper properly, with an opening prayer, taken directly from Scripture.

"PSALM 31"

Twenty two years ago the homeland of my ancestors was torn apart by the savagery of civil strife and an unjust invasion by a foreign army. War will always remain that ultimate showcase of "man's inhumanity towards man", hence the issue of East Timor is more than just a political one, for in it's very essence it reflects that age-old battle of good versus evil.

For a lot of you present, the realities of war are things you'll never experience and yet in your daily lives you too have to fight your own battles. As one who was born in East Timor and lived most of her life in Perth, WA, I have had the good fortune of experiencing life in "both worlds".

I have seen good and bad in both. I have seen how suffering is not restricted to race, creed or culture-it is a condition of the human spirit-a condition of what we Catholics call "sin" or evil in this world. Equally I have seen how the love of God is the only true power that can transcend all pain and all suffering.

With the advent of the Internet, the global village is no longer just an abstract, the world really is a small place. Every single one of us has a right to life and a right to belong in this global village of ours because every single one of us is made in the image of God. A God that is "self giving, life giving and love giving". Thus to reflect this image we are all called to live in a "self giving, life giving and love giving" manner, no matter when, where and who we are in this global village of ours. A lot of what is wrong and unjust in the world can be brought back to our failure to remember this simple truth.

In my own personal experience, twenty two years ago, long before solidarity groups or other "interested parties" saw the East Timor issue as a "cause worth fighting for" a group of "self giving, life giving and love giving" women responded to the obvious injustices of the situation and worked to do nothing more, but nothing less than to love and care for the people of East Timor. This group of women happened to belong to an order of Catholic religious sisters, known as the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary sisters or more simply as the "Pressies". This religious order , was founded by a brave Irish woman called Nano Nagle, mainly in response to the injustices of the times she lived in and in particular to allow education of the poor in 18th Century Ireland. Nano's vision and mission spread from Ireland to various parts of the world and luckily for us the Sisters were present in Perth, WA, when we took refuge in our new homeland. It was with the Pressies that I was taught to live "Together in Christ"-in a primary school called St Thomas'-which incidentally housed children from other war torn countries such as Vietnam and Poland-and coincidentally twenty two years on I happen to be working with two people from these countries who also attended St Thomas'. It is often said that coincidence is but the hand of God

that goes unrecognised, I like coincidences. It was also with the Pressies that I learnt the meaning of "Pro Deo et Patria" and perhaps it is because of Deo and because of them that I am able to stand here before you today.

Catholicism in my immediate family is very important-it is why although being very much of East Timorese descent, I have the freedom to speak before you all as an independent young woman unbound by any political, cultural or familial ties. It is why my younger sister is named after our Lady of Fatima and why most of the Timorese girls I know have as their second name, Maria, after Mary our mother. The Catholic faith in East Timor ofcourse dates back to the arrival of the 1st Portuguese missionaries in East Timor and it is no coincidence that the faith that is uniting the people in East Timor will be the faith that will ultimately give us peace in it's very real sense.

In Australia a lot has changed over twenty two years. But I hear that in East Timor the people still believe in the sacred, in divine providence, in the intercessions of Our Lady of Fatima-but what can they know-after all, the majority of them (including at least one of the recent Nobel Peace Prize recipients) hail from small villages in their truest sense.

In Perth, Western Australia, in the eyes of the recently arrived East Timorese, especially the children and the orphans I see a reflection of me as I was twenty two years ago and probably still am today. What I don't see is the unconditional love and support for these people that I benefitted from all those years ago and carry with me to this day. Maybe I am blind-maybe I have just failed to "progress" like the rest of Australia?

I mentioned at the beginning that I do not belong to any of the political parties that exist to help the cause of East Timor. This does not mean that I am unconscious of the fact that politics is very much a reality which will exist as long as the homo sapiens species tramples the earth. It is a life choice for me not to be involved in any of the political parties because life for me is not about politics. Life for me is about attaining my completeness and holiness, my peace, in doing God's will and I will now expand on how I think this peace can be received by the majority of us.

I read recently that "The subject of peace is too serious to leave in the hands of the politicians, and it is too complex to entrust it to religious persons". So if we are all

serious about peace in East Timor-we are already half way there-thanks to the discerning efforts of last year's Nobel Peace Prize selection committee.

I do not know neither Bishop Belo nor Ramos Horta personally and because I unashamedly view the world through Catholic tinted glasses, I have tended to read up more on what the Bishop says and what is said of him. We have all heard of the Catholic grapevine-if there is one thing that can give it a run for it's money it's the East Timorese grapevine-so my impressions of the Bishop are unashamedly through "very reliable sources".

The fact that Bishop Belo is chief administrator of the Roman Catholic faith in East Timor and given that the majority of East Timorese still reside in East Timor, I would say that at this present moment the Bishop represents the true authority of the people of East Timor. Critics will point out that the Bishop is meddling inpolitical affairs-I beg to differ-as he is their spiritual head and doing what spiritual leaders do best. The laws governing the authority of a bishop are summarised thus:

CCC passage 888, LG 25.

Equally, I would like to quote directly from the CCC on the word "authority".

So what does all this mean for the political parties and the people outside East Timor? If I were to believe the popular press, I would also have to believe that the main political authority on East Timor is the CNRM. But as I stated earlier, I have sources that are much more reliable than the mass media.

I am not here to cut down to size the members of the CNRM nor any other political party associated with the East Timor issue. I am merely going to raise a few questions and make some suggestions.

Last year I went to listen to the speech by Ramos Horta given at the Christ Church Centre for Ethics in Perth, WA, my hometown. In his speech Horta concisely related the history of colonial rule not only in East Timor but worldwide and if memory servese me correctly, he stated that indigenous peoples have historically been footnotes in those colourful texts we like to call "history books" but these indigenous peoples are now taking their God-given rightful place in the world.

Your reception of the Nobel Peace Prize is indeed a valid recognition of the hard work you have carried out on East Timor's behalf over the past 22 years. However if you are to continue to be a true leader-might I be so bold as to suggest that you drop the

term Maubere from the "umbrella" organisation you claim to be special representative of-because through my Catholic tinted glasses and as grandaughter of a truly indigenous East Timorese woman, who may not be able to read or write her own name, but is none-the-less still made in the image of God, the term Maubere is a derogative which should not be allowed to describe my grandmother nor the very people it purports to "stand up for".

Now I realise that there is great talk and speculation on a referendum for the people of East Timor to decide what happens to East Timor. In reality the political goings-on that will play some part in achieving the peace in East Timor will happen in corridors far from the village huts of the indigenous peoples.

My question is-when did the referendum for the people outside East Timor take place which gave authority for the CNRM to be the major "representative political body" and why did I not get a ballot paper in the mail (I might add regardless of whether or not I were to vote!). If this referendum has occurred and I am just unaware of it-then please accept my apology. If this referendum has not occured and I leave this question open to all the leaders of the major political parties present-how on earth do you expect a referendum to take place in East Timor-occupied by a foreign army-when you have not had one for the "freer" East Timorese. If I may be so bold as to suggest that the sooner such processes occur the better for the political cause of East Timor.

I now turn to what I see needs doing even before such a referendum can be organised. If peace is to come to East Timor, peace must be received by the East Timorese. True peace can only be a gift from God. So for any referendums to take place a certain coversion of hearts must precede. To desire this conversion is already the response to the call that God has placed in each one of your hearts.

It is no good saying "Get the Indonesians out first, then we'll deal with the rest later". We've already lost lives in the civil strife and too many atrocities have been committed with the illegal occupation. This band-aid mentality towards "resolution of conflict" is the common fundamental flaw that has seen the downfall of most politically orientated "peace plans" we have had in history.

Freedom from oppression for the people of East Timor both in and out the nation's boundaries is not restricted solely to freedom from a foreign army of oppression.

in Perth who have chosen to try to live their faith and pass it on their children are perhaps the most free and happiest of all families, providing Australia and indeed the world with free and happy law-abiding citizens.

So how should the Church leaders go about obtaining religious and priests to help East Timorese in Australia? Unfortunately Australia is not the answer. Vocations in Australia are few and far between and a lot of the religious institutes simply do not have the "people power" for what is required. East Timor has a 500 year history of Catholic tradition and links with Portugal-and I believe that sisters and priests from East Timor and/or Portugal would be beneficial not only for the East Timorese but the wider Catholic community in Australia. I of course do not know the inns and outs of how this would be achieved-but there would be Church leaders present who could perhaps take on this message and act on it.

Where to find the money for education and housing of the religious and priests? The answer does lie in Australia. In Perth alone there are many Catholic primary schools and many high schools-filled with children of all sorts of ethnic backgrounds who are all willing to "have a go together"-and I am sure they would be more than willing to take on the recently arrived East Timorese Although facing tough budget cuts from the government, most of the local Catholic high schools are more than equiped to show why Catholic schooling exists and why education of the poor is imperative-because as I stated above-poverty is always relative.

The religious houses in Australia are faced with a very real lack of new vocations. Many institutions are simply dying out-but spiritually and materially they still have a lot to offer by means of housing and supporting the East Timorese religious and priests. This may require a "letting go" as it where of that which is unnecesary and a "re-evangelisng" of the truth that perhaps may never have been let go by some of these insitutes. My recommendations may seem too daunting and even judgemental for any-one to take up the challenge for East Timor. But from my personal perspective I believe firmly that the needs are there and these needs can be met.

At the beginning I started with a prayer to Yahweh-the God of all peoples. For those of you who think I am just a bible bashing youth with "no idea" I would like to give

PSALM 31

Prayer in time of ordeal

For the choirmaster Psalm Of David

1 In you, Yahweh, I take shelter;
never let me be disgraced.
In your righteousness deliver me, rescue me,
2 turn your ear to me, make haste!

Be a sheltering rock for me,
a walled fortress to save me!
3 For you are my rock, my fortress;
for the sake of your name, guide me, lead me!

4 Pull me out of the net they have spread for me,
for you are my refuge;
5 into your hands I commit my spirit,
you have redeemed me, Yahweh.

6 God of truth, you hate
those who serve worthless idols;
but I put my trust in Yahweh:
7 I will exult, and rejoice in your love!

You, who have seen my wretchedness,
and known the miseries of my soul,
8 have not handed me over to the enemy,
you have given my feet space and to spare.

9 Take pity on me, Yahweh,
I am in trouble now.
Grief wastes away my eye,
my throat, my inmost parts.

10 For my life is worn out with sorrow,
my years with sighs;
my strength yields under misery,
my bones are wasting away.

11 To every one of my oppressors
I am contemptible,
loathsome to my neighbours,
to my friends a thing of fear.

Those who see me in the street
hurry past me;
12 I am forgotten, as good as dead in their hearts,
something discarded.

13 I hear their endless slanders,
threats from every quarter,
as they combine against me,
plotting to take my life.

b. Another name for Lebanon.
30 a. I.e., my death.

But I put my trust in you, Yahweh,
I say, 'You are my God'.
My days are in your hand, rescue me
from the hands of my enemies and persecutors;
let your face smile on your servant,
save me in your love.

I invoke you, Yahweh; do not let me be disgraced,
let the disgrace fall on the wicked!
May they go speechless to Sheol,
their lying lips struck dumb
for those insolent slurs on the virtuous,
for that arrogance and contempt.

Yahweh, how great your goodness,
reserved for those who fear you,
bestowed on those who take shelter in you,
for all mankind to see!

Safe in your presence you hide them
far from the wiles of men;
inside your tent you shelter them
far from the war of tongues.

Blessed be Yahweh, who performs
marvels of love for me
(in a fortress-city)!
In my alarm I exclaimed,
'I have been snatched out of your sight!'
Yet you heard my petition
when I called to you for help.

Love Yahweh, all you devout:
Yahweh, protector of the faithful,
will repay the arrogant
with interest.
Be strong, let your heart be bold,
all you who hope in Yahweh!

882 The *Pope*, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful."[402] "For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."[403]

883 "The *college or body of bishops* has no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head." As such, this college has "supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff."[404]

884 "The college of bishops exercises power over the universal Church in a solemn manner in an ecumenical council."[405] But "there never is an ecumenical council which is not confirmed or at least recognized as such by Peter's successor."[406]

885 "This college, in so far as it is composed of many members, is the expression of the variety and universality of the People of God; and of the unity of the flock of Christ, in so far as it is assembled under one head."[407]

886 "The individual *bishops* are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches."[408] As such, they "exercise their pastoral office over the portion of the People of God assigned to them,"[409] assisted by priests and deacons. But, as a member of the episcopal college, each bishop shares in the concern for all the Churches.[410] The bishops exercise this care first "by ruling well their own Churches as portions of the universal Church," and so contributing "to the welfare of the whole Mystical Body, which, from another point of view, is a corporate body of Churches."[411] They extend it especially to the poor,[412] to those persecuted for the faith, as well as to missionaries who are working throughout the world.

402 *LG* 23.
403 *LG* 22; cf. *CD* 2, 9.
404 *LG* 22; cf. CIC, can. 336.
405 CIC, can. 337 § 1.
406 *LG* 22.
407 *LG* 22.
408 *LG* 23.
409 *LG* 23.
410 Cf. *CD* 3.
411 *LG* 23.
412 Cf. *Gal* 2:10.